

# Skip the Dishes? Not so Fast! Sex and Housework Revisited

**Matthew D. Johnson**

**Jared R. Anderson**

**Nancy L. Galambos**

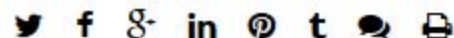
## When men do housework, does it harm the couple's sex life?

- A recent study by Kornrich and colleagues (2013) found
  - ↑ husband contributions to **core** housework (preparing meals, cleaning house, etc.) are associated with ↓ frequent sex
  - ↑ husband contributions to **non-core** housework (outdoor work, auto maintenance, etc.) are associated with ↑ frequent sex
- “traditionally masculine and feminine behaviors consciously or unconsciously serve as turn-ons for individuals” (p. 31)



# Men, Those Chores You Do for Your Wife are Killing Your Sex Life

Hal M. Bundrick | [+Follow](#) Feb 11, 2014 3:58 PM EST



# Guys Who Do Housework Get Less Sex

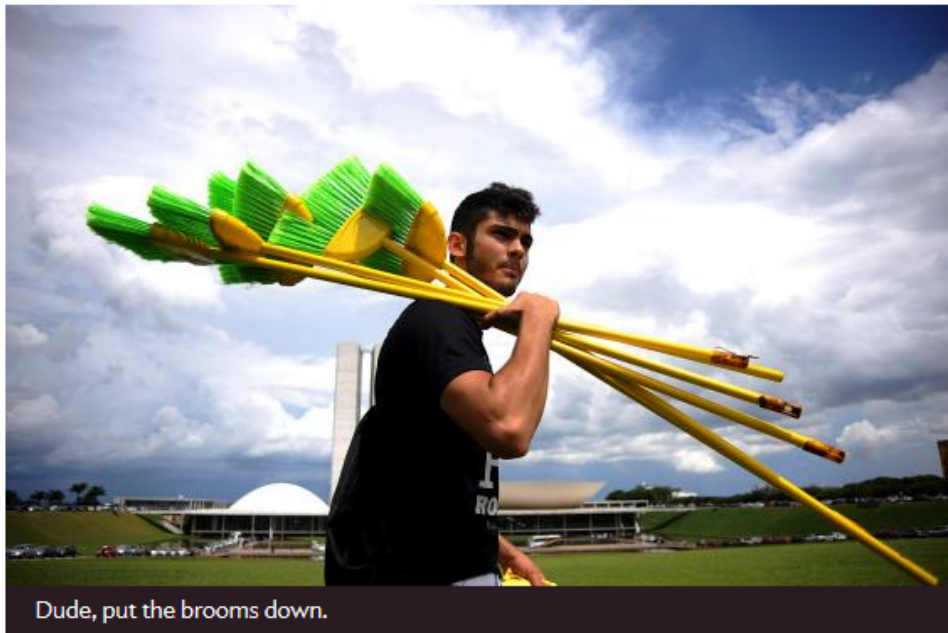
By Christina Hoff Sommers



3.1k

348

1



Dude, put the brooms down.

Photo by Pedro Ladeira/AFP/Getty Images

It may be gratifying for women to see their husbands loading the dishwasher or folding laundry, but is it sexy? Yes, according to many media stories. “Men: Want More Sex? Do the Laundry” was headline of a 2009 **report** from CBS News.



**Barbara Risman** ♥ Become a fan

Professor of Sociology, University of Illinois at Chicago and  
Executive Officer, Council on Contemporary Families



# Is Housework Sexy? Or Are Manly Men Getting More?

Posted: 02/07/2013 7:12 pm EST | Updated: 04/09/2013 5:12 am EDT

73	24	11	0	10
Like	Share	Tweet	LinkedIn	Comment



alamy

Just how hot can a conversation be about housework? A few years ago, research suggested that the more housework men do, the more sex they enjoy. It made sense: Men who shared the work of running their homes had happier, and less tired, wives to cuddle with. But now, new research by Sabino Kornrich, Julie Brines and Katrina Leupp published this week in the *American Sociological Review* suggests that men who

## Does a More Equal Marriage Mean Less Sex?

By LORI GOTTLIEB FEB. 6, 2014

**Granted, some might** view a study like this with skepticism. Correlations don't establish causation, and especially when it comes to sex, there's always a risk of reporting bias and selective sampling, not to mention the mood of a subject at the time of the survey. (Was she answering the questions while standing next to a big pile of garbage that hadn't been taken out?) What's more, while this study used the most recent nationally representative data that included measures of sexual frequency and a couple's division of labor, it was drawn from information collected in the 1990s. (Julie Brines, an author of the chores study, explained, however, that many studies on housework since then show that not much has changed in terms of division of labor.) **But as a psychotherapist who works with couples, I've noticed something similar to the findings. That is, it's true that being stuck with all the chores rarely tends to make wives desire their husbands.** Yet having their partner, say, load the dishwasher — a popular type of marital intervention suggested by self-help books, women's magazines and therapists alike — doesn't seem to have much of an effect on their libido, either. Many of my colleagues have observed the same thing: No matter how much sink-scrubbing and grocery-shopping the husband does, no matter how well husband and wife communicate with each other, no matter how sensitive they are to each other's emotions and work schedules, the wife does not find her husband more sexually exciting, even if she feels both closer to and happier with him.

## When men do **MOST** of the housework, does it harm the couple's sex life?

- Carlson and colleagues (2014) found
- Only husbands who do **most** of **core** housework report  
↓ frequent sex and ↓ satisfying sex for husbands and wives
- There were **no differences** in **sexual satisfaction or frequency** between those where **wives do most** or **housework is shared equally**
- Male partners' housework contributions only harm couple sexuality when it **defies societal expectations**

## What about perceived **fairness** of housework contributions?

- People want to be treated **fairly** and **equitably** in relationships (Crosby, 1976)
- React to injustice with **anger** and **resentment**
- Carlson et al. (2014) found perceived fairness of housework contributions was associated with ↑ sexual frequency and ↑ satisfaction



# Developmental Systems Perspective (DSP) (Lerner et., 2011)

- **DSP**
  - Behavior has potential for **plasticity** – or change across time
  - Change results from dynamic **interactions** between **person** and **context**
  - Change process may involve **unidirectional** as well as **bidirectional** (reciprocal) influences
- **Considering couple sexuality, DSP implies**
  - Sexual relations **likely to change** across time in **response** to **interactions** between and behaviors of partners
  - Longitudinal research necessary to sort out **directionality** of associations between sex and partner behavior

## Research Questions

- **Do men who do more housework really get less sex?**
  - Lower frequency and lower sexual satisfaction?
- **Is perceived fairness in housework related to sex?**

# Significance

- A **rare longitudinal examination** of linkages between housework and *sexuality*
- Our approach represents a **rigorous examination** of linkages between housework and *sexuality*
  - Accounts for prior levels of each construct
  - Accounts for concurrent associations between constructs
  - Uses male and female partner reports of housework

## Procedures

- Waves 1 – 5
- Intimate partner pairs in *Pairfam* ( $n = 3,743$ )
- Filtered sample to include those in continuing partnership ( $n = 1,476$ )
- Excluded adolescent age cohort and same-sex couples
- Excluded those not doing housework
- Final sample: 1,338 couples

# Housework Measures

- **Male Partner Share of Housework**

- *To what extent do you and your partner share duties in the following domains?*
  - Housework (washing, cooking, cleaning) and Shopping
  - 1 = (almost) completely female partner to 5 = (almost) completely male partner
  - Each partner's report (waves 1 – 5)

- **Fairness of Housework Contributions**

- *Looking at both housework and paid work, how fair is the division of labor between you and your partner?*
  - 0 = I do not do my fair share and 1 = I do about my fair share
  - Male partner report (waves 1, 3, 5)

# Sex Measures

- **Sexual Frequency**

- *How often have you had sexual intercourse on average during the past three months with your partner?*
  - 1 = not in the past 3 months to 7 = daily
  - Anchor's report (waves 2 – 4)

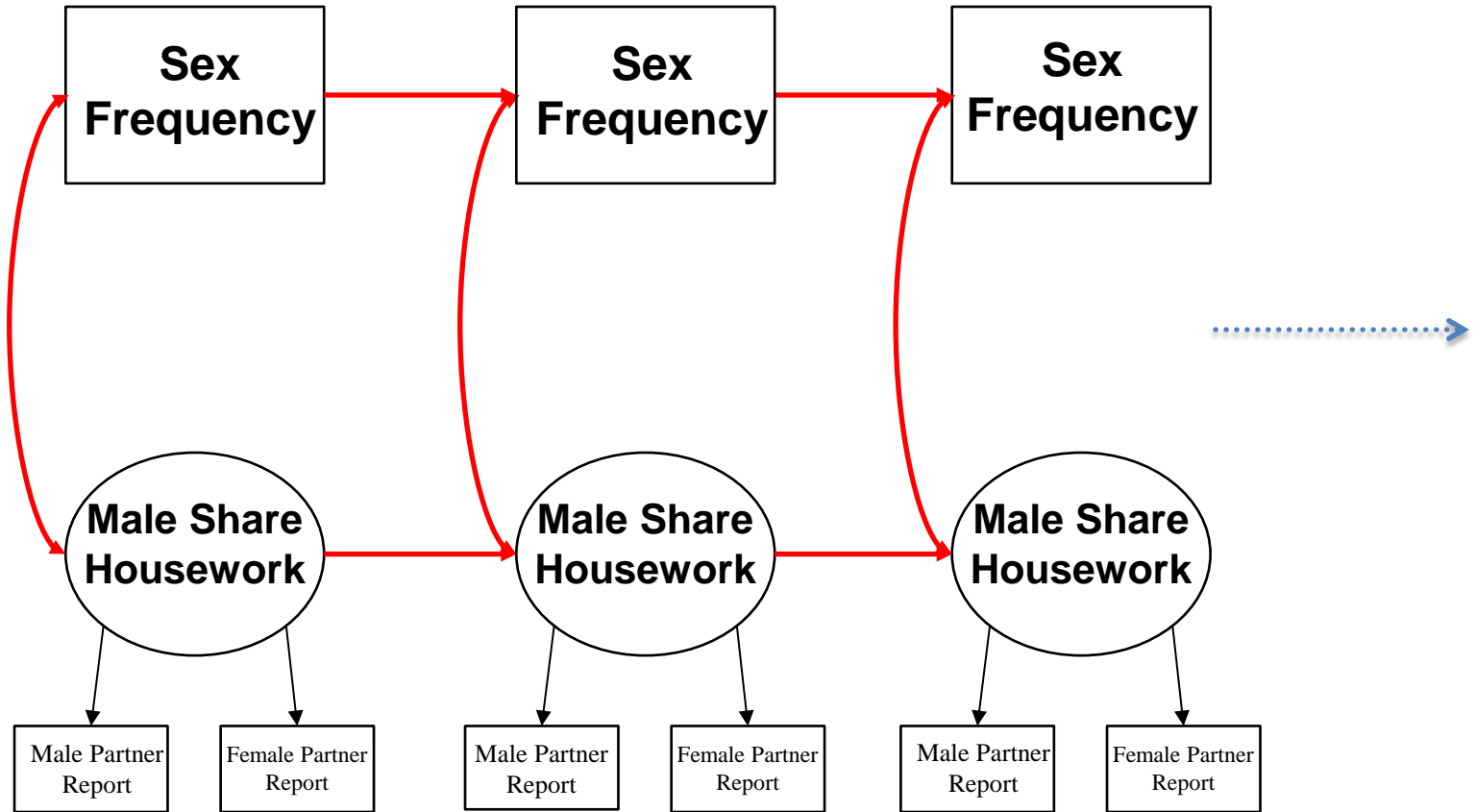
- **Sexual Satisfaction**

- *How satisfied are you with your sex life?*
  - 0 = very dissatisfied to 10 = very satisfied
  - Each partner's report (waves 1 – 5)

# Analytic Plan

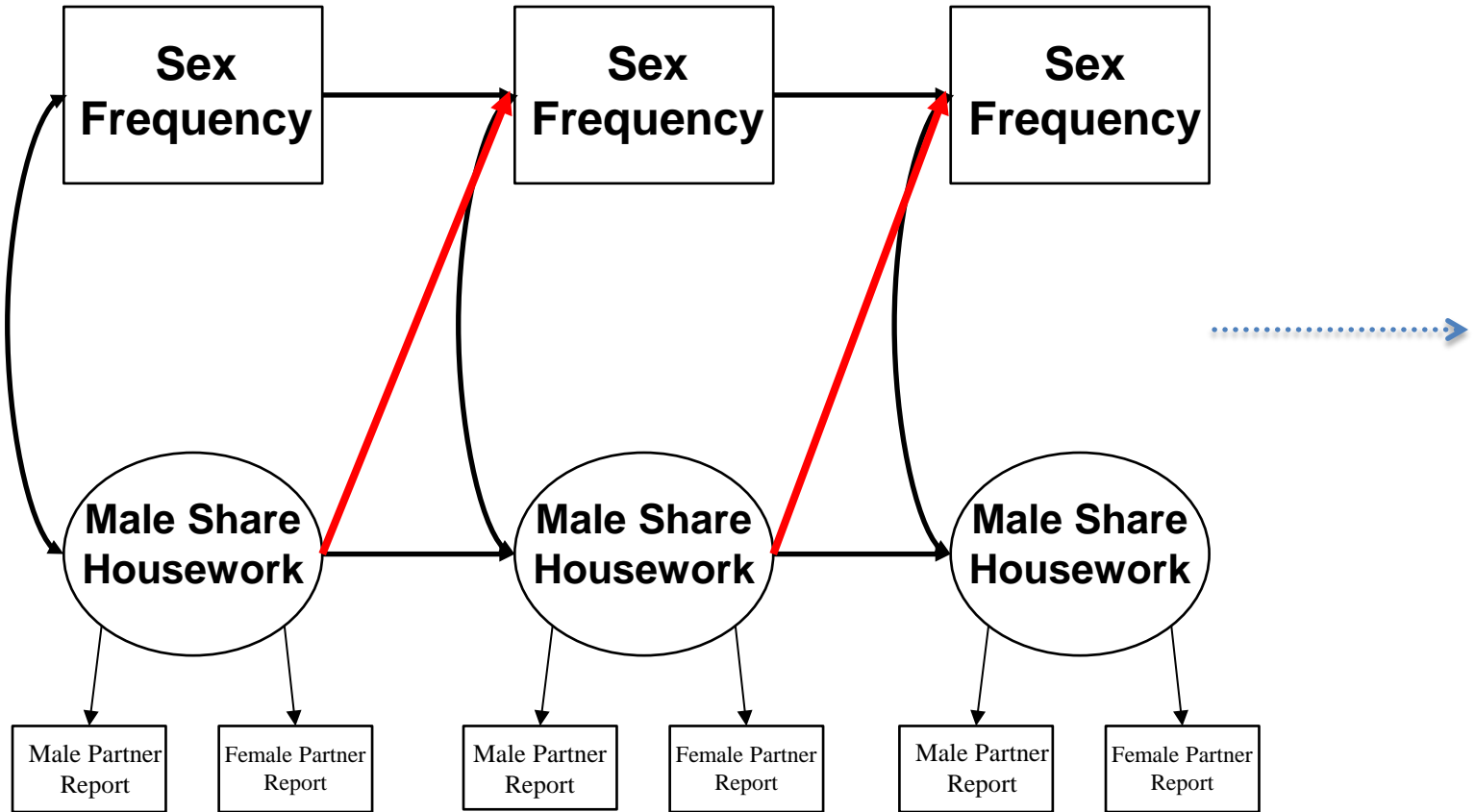
- **Data analysis conducted in Mplus 7.11 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012)**
- **Research questions answered with series of autoregressive cross-lagged models**

# Prototype Baseline (Stability) Model: Housework and Sex Merely Covary

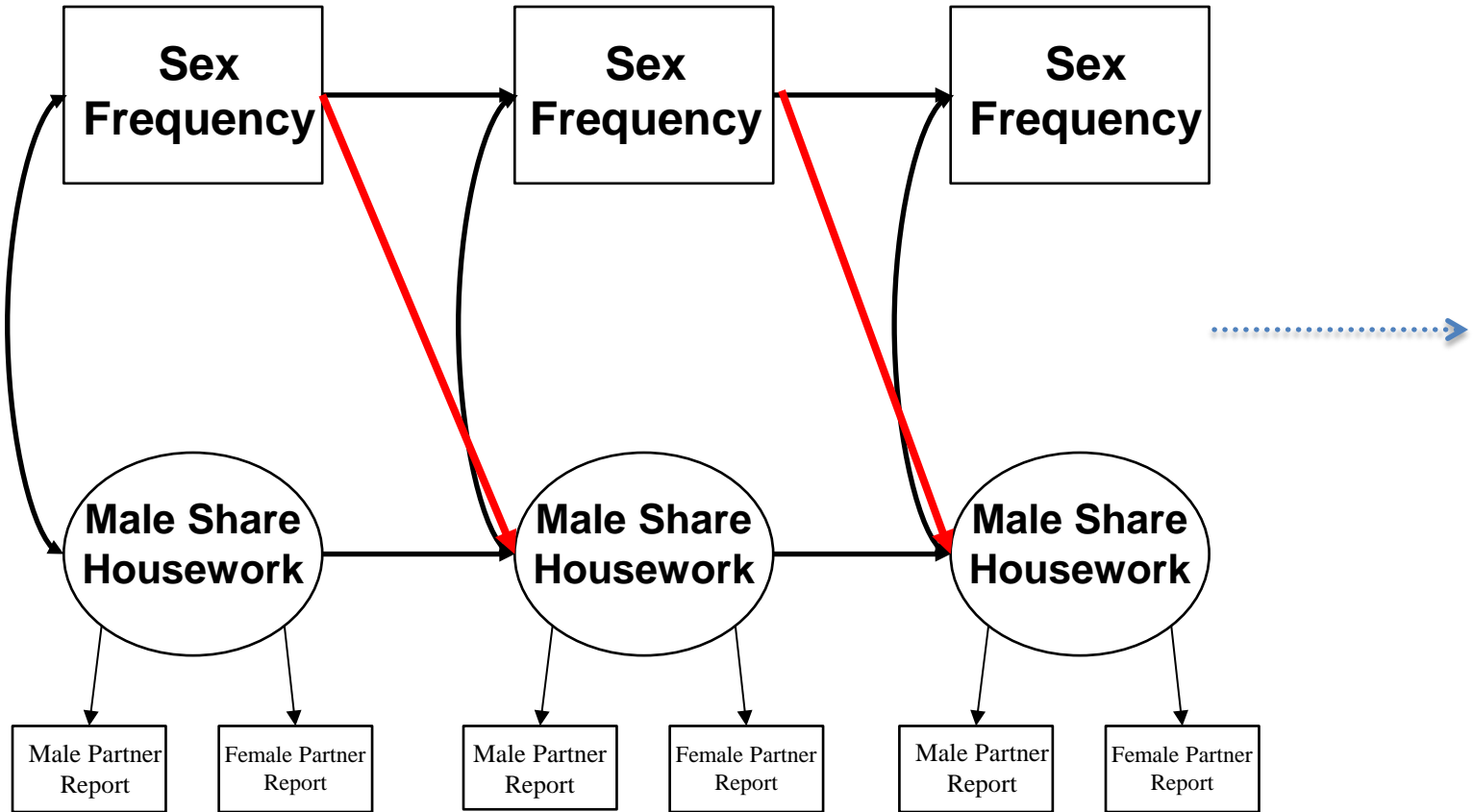




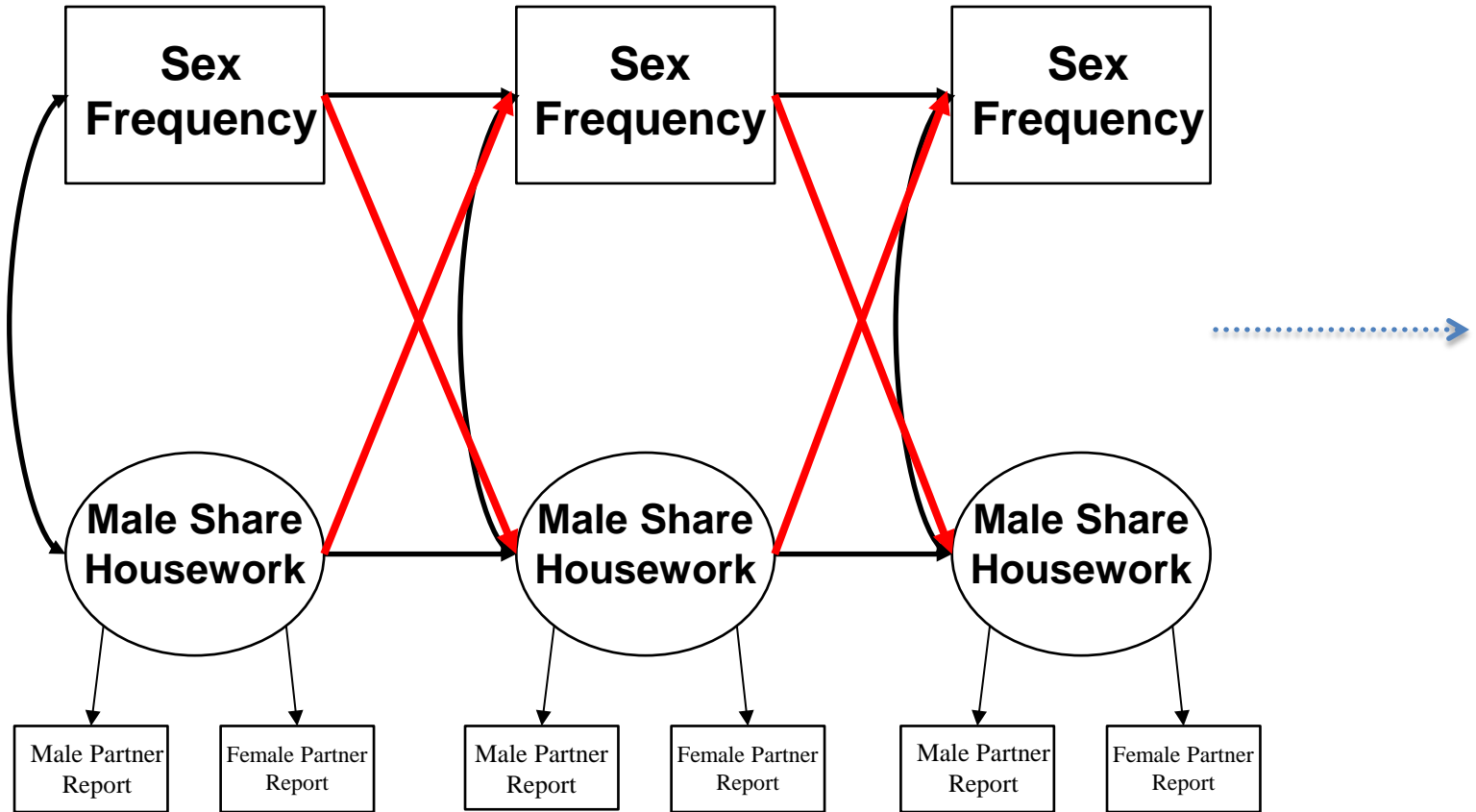
# Prototype Unidirectional Model: Does more housework lead to less (or more) sex?



# Prototype Unidirectional Model: Does more sex lead to less (or more) housework?



# Prototype Bidirectional Model: Are housework and sex reciprocally related?



## **Models compared for two sexual outcomes**

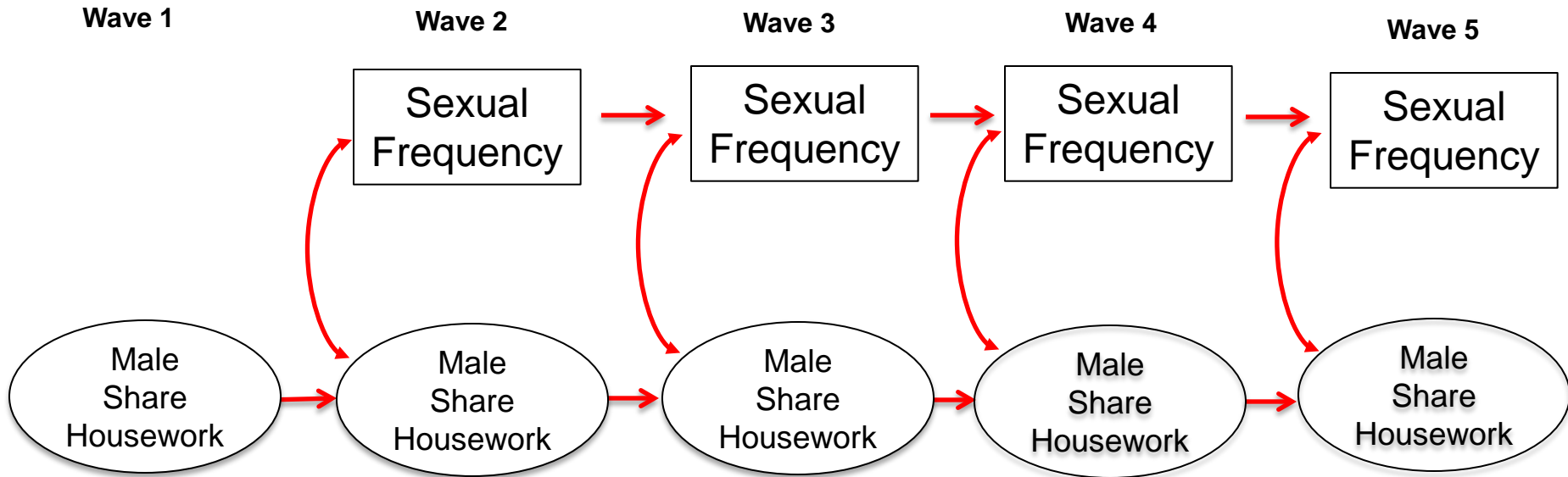
- Frequency of sex (anchor report)
- Sexual satisfaction (male, female separately)

## **And two measures of housework**

- Male share (male, female reports combined)
- Male partner perceptions of fairness

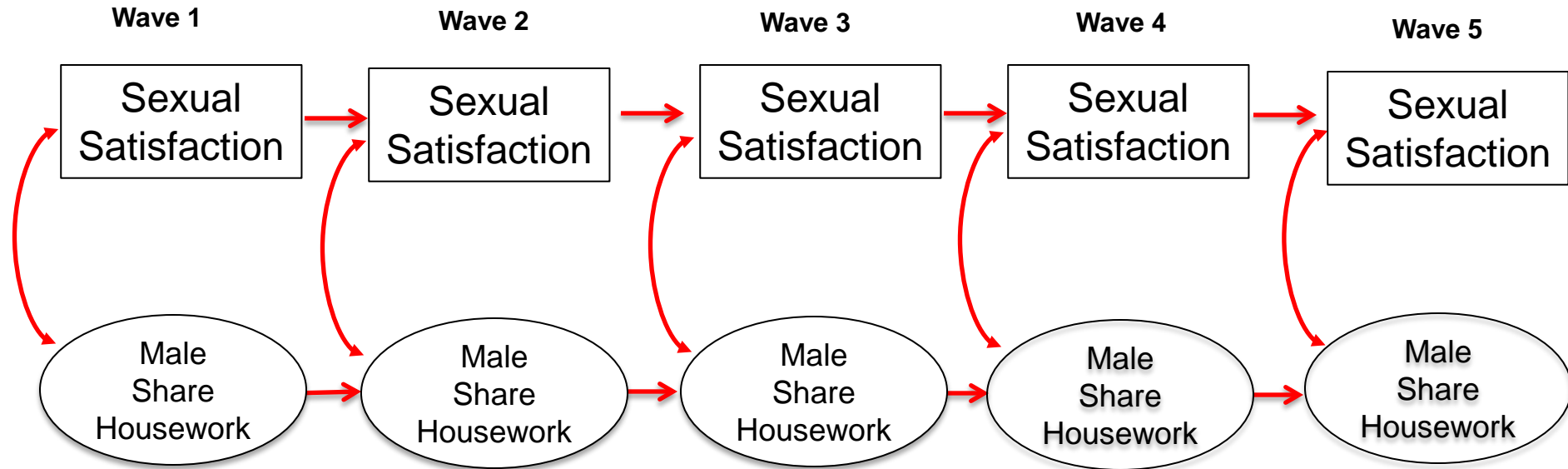
# Does Housework Lead to Less Sex?

- **No - Baseline Model Fit Best**



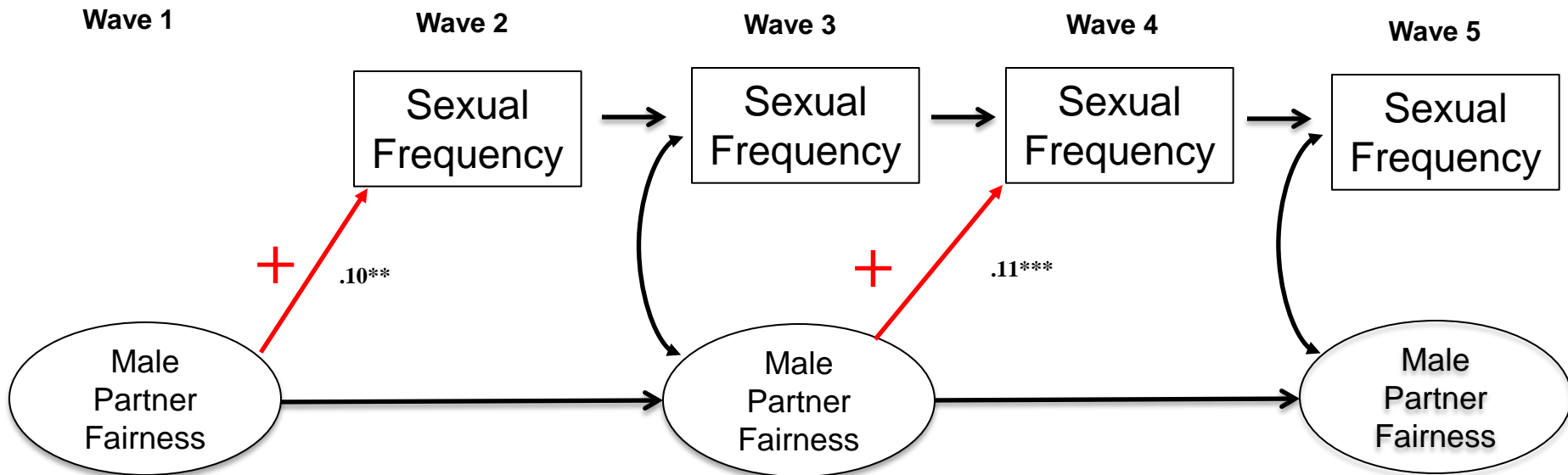
# Does Housework Lead to Less *Satisfying* Sex?

- **No - Baseline Model** Fit Best for **Male and Female Partner Sexual Satisfaction**



# Does *Fair* Contribution Lead to More Sex?

- **Yes - Unidirectional Model Fit Best**

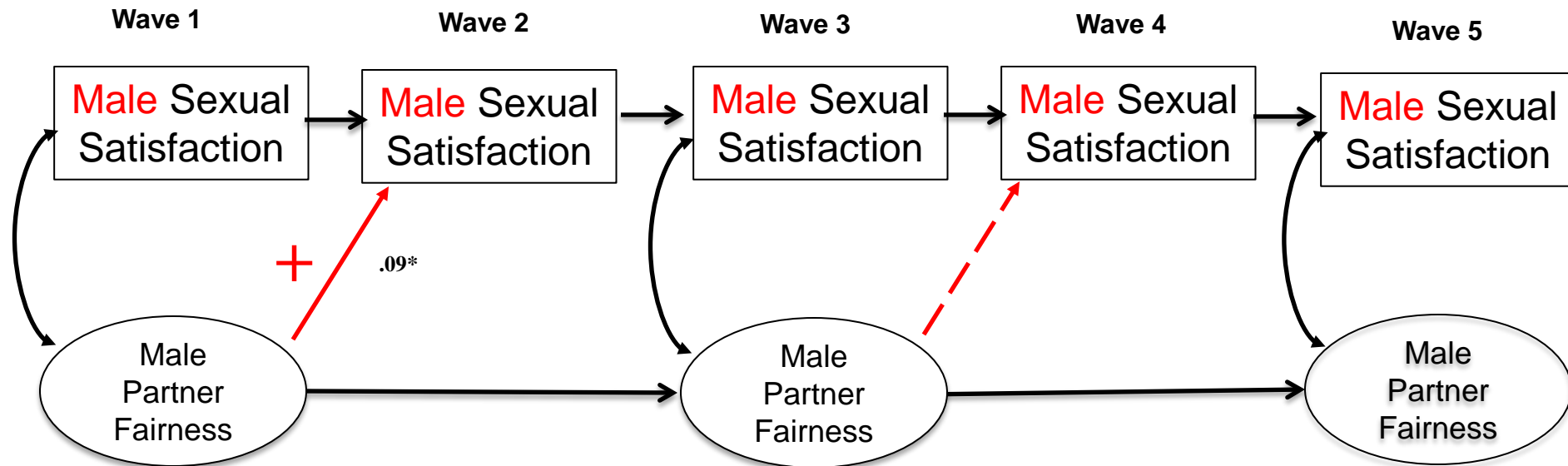


Model Fit Indices:  $\chi^2$  (36) = 66.863; RMSEA = .027 (C. I. = .017, .037); CFI = .976

Control variables: relationship satisfaction, age, and self-reported health for each partner and relationship length, marital status, residing in the former East Germany, and number of children.

# Does Fair Contribution Lead to Men's More *Satisfying* Sex?

- **Promising – Unidirectional Model Fit Best**



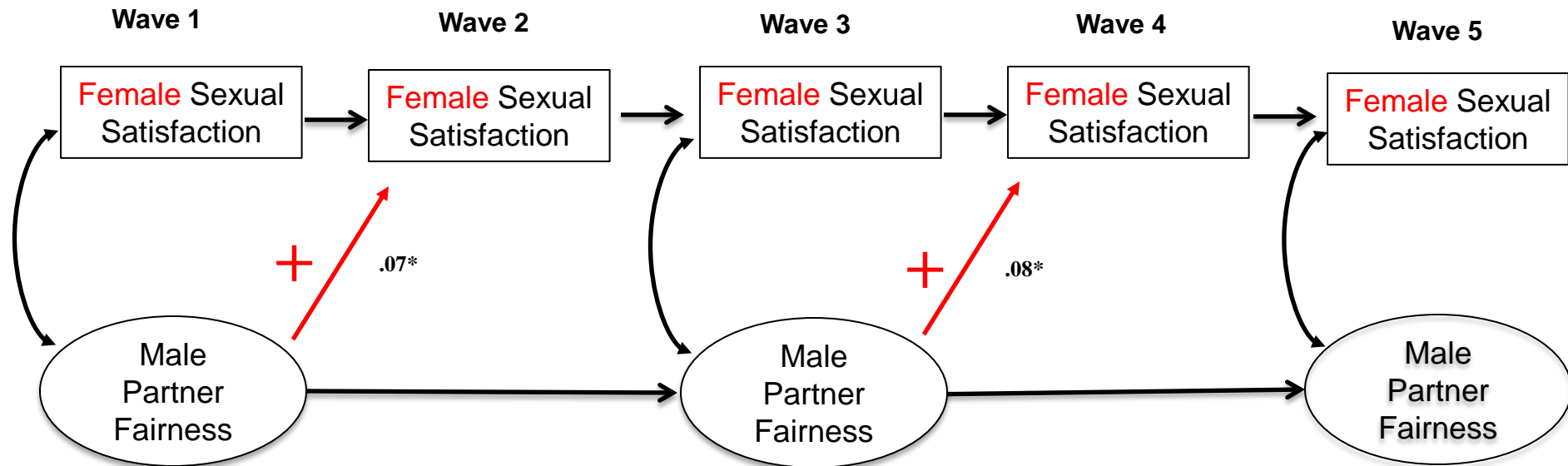
Model Fit Indices:  $\chi^2 (53) = 122.273$ ; RMSEA = .032 (C. I. = .025, .039); CFI = .960

Control variables: relationship satisfaction, age, and self-reported health for each partner and relationship length, marital status, residing in the former East Germany, and number of children.



# Does Fair Contribution Lead to Women's More *Satisfying* Sex?

- **Yes – Unidirectional Model Fit Best**



Model Fit Indices:  $\chi^2 (53) = 154.364$ ; RMSEA = .039 (C. I. = .032, .046); CFI = .941

Control variables included: relationship satisfaction, age, and self-reported health for each partner and relationship length, marital status, residing in the former East Germany, and number of children.

## Discussion

- Do men who do more housework really get less sex?
- In contrast to prior studies (Carlson et al., 2014; Kornrich et al., 2013), we find **no associations** between male partner share of housework and three indicators of couple sexual functioning
- Rather, making a fair contribution to housework is associated with **more frequent and satisfying sex** for both partners
- Rather than striving toward an **equal** split in housework, perhaps couples should articulate what they perceive to be **fair**

## Discussion

- Why does fairness matter rather than a more objective report of how housework is shared?
- Determining whether contributions are **fair** necessitates consideration of **social referents**, **personal expectations**, and the couple's **context**
- Equal is not always fair
- The **meaning** ascribed to housework contributions (i.e., fair or unfair) rather than simply **“who does what”** is a more **potent motivator** of future **sexual functioning**

## Discussion

- Underscores the importance of using **Pairfam** to answer **important questions** about family life
- Highlights the utility of the **Developmental Systems Perspective** to motivate conceptualization and analysis of research questions

## Conclusion

- **Rather than trying to avoid housework in the hopes of having more sex, men would be better served by simply doing their part around the house.**
- **We suspect this might involve scrubbing dishes from time to time.**